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FAUST DIRECTOR -BETWEEN “THE MOMENT”AND THE NEW THEATRICALITY

“We now live in a state of chaos and plague and these are constantly producing art and play” declared the Romanian director Silviu Purcarete. Phenomena like globalization, invasion of mass media, cloning, terrorism, obsession of Apocalypse determined the *theatricality* to be stronger. This fact led to the reborn power of the directing. In the hypostasis of Faustus, the director followed by the “moment” in order to find and master the world offers three models: the model of *remix* – the total deconstruction of the classical text and its transformation into a post modern script, mainly visual; the model *royal court* – the design of the performance in terms of theatre team building; and the model *theatre doc* – the lecture of the every day life, conflicts and human behaviour of the contemporary mankind viewed in a theatrical key.

In the nowadays Romanian theatre we find these three models having major and solid results besides other models which are superficial, confusing, baffling. From the category of the successful ones I would like to mention some examples of national and international value which entered in a dialogue with the theatre of the world. The director and the school of stage directing have a privileged place within the Romanian culture an this has been noticed by the masters like Giorgio Strehler (*“The Romanian theatre is especially a directing theatre”*), Antoine Vitez (*“You have a strong directing school”*), Peter Brook (*“The Romanian directing has got a privileged place in the Romanian Theatre.”*)

The tradition, the tours, the trophies, the spectacular performances are to give confirmation to the appreciations of these patriarchs of the theatre. Even after the fall of

the Wall, after '89, the noble blazon of recognition remained the directing. Today, the Romanian theatre offered a core of personalities, where four generations of directors from the country and outside it, meet and communicate.

The most brilliant director of the '80th generation, **Silviu Purcărete**, imposed his signature by transforming the Theatre "Radu Stanca" of Sibiu in a *Royal Court* of the Romanian theatre. After the experience of the National Theatre of Craiova where he created scenic masterpieces like: *Ubu Rex With Scenes of Macbeth*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Phaedra*, *The Danaïdes*, *Orestia* – which authorized him as a big stage director "*a very strong and original personality within the family of the big European directors*" – as it appears in the international press), **Purcărete** achieved two anthological settings in the hypostasis of Director-Dramaturge. In *Pilaffs and Mule Perfume* exercises on texts from the book of *One Thousand and One Nights* illustrates at its best the searching and the nature of the *new theatricality*. His preference for an archetypal theatre leads him towards "*an excessive visualization which helps me to express myself the best. I think it is a way of perceiving the world*" – as the artist shows. Sherezada's stories, full of violent and delicate sensations, rudeness and refinement inspire him with a saga about our time disturbed by concerns and crises. The picaresque elements, the opulent feasts, and the colossal fabulous, the free and licentious manners make up a chaotically setting, fruit of a feverish fantasy: "*excessive travel without aim and without rigour, a travel of luxury and melancholia*", named expressively by the author. He proposes deliberately to maintain the contingent nature of the performance: "*Like Sheherezada, I wanted to break the ongoing history and let pass a tale, a song, an image, a word, a poem.*" **Silviu Purcărete** builds a rich visual, acoustic and olfactive performance where food is prepared and we are attracted by luring smells of cooking. A donkey and two sheep are walking undisturbed. The theatrical means are very varied: farces, shadows, masks, videos, cinema, and circus: "*we do not exclude any technique*" – declares the director. A world of flesh puppets with painted faces, violently outlined eyes and lips, tyrannically dominated by erotic and gastronomic phantoms. Finally, we are invited to a big feast where a young girl is brought on a tray which is garnished with pilaff and sausages devoured on the spot by the actors. **Silviu Purcărete** alternates the grace with the grotesque; he creates a dream full of games where the madness of the play abolishes

spaces, intensifying the feelings. You feel the mysterious power of the theatre: the stage becomes mystery, religious ceremony, but also a factory of illusions. A style exercise where the director uses all the scenic means working on a script of which he is totally responsible. *Pantagruel's Sister in Law*, a co-production France-Germany-Romania-Hungary continues this experience illustrating its poetry. But this time his radicalism linked to the *new theatricality* is total. He inspired himself from Rabelais; he takes out motives from the author's writings without a previous script. The performance becomes a group creation implying the actors, the scene designer, and the composer. "*A Rabelais without words*" speaking about a monstrous vitality, a vampirical way of living. The Realistic signs (reminding the naturalism) have an explosive energy in this oniric, poetical performance – getting out of another time, but still so much contemporary, speaking about our every day dreams and nightmares. Visual and acoustic seduction, rich arsenal: dance, singing, multimedia, set of table linen and forks of one meter length, giant pots, a bell – are some of the ingredients of this performance which ends with a chocking image: human bread devoured by the characters. The searching of the new forms is ingenuously made assuming the risk, but permanently taking into consideration the polymorph actor's resources. The joy of inventing is performing freely, with vigour and rigour.

The preference for classical literature where he is searching the deep reality of the mankind is to be found also at **Radu Afrim** – "*the terrible child of the young directing generation*". His performances break conventions provoking the critics and the audience by an insolent non-convention in using the theatrical language. Fan of the *remix* technique, he is offered two original settings: *Algae (Bernarda's House Remix)* after Lorca and *Three Sisters* after Chekhov, the last one presented to the participants at the IATC Congress in Bucharest (2003). **Afrim**'s vision determined polemical reactions. Famous critics leave after a few minutes the theatre hall and Michael Bellington contested it in **The Guardian**. This attitude produces a controversial debate pro-Afrim in the Romanian press, many Romanian and foreign critics participating at the Congress appreciating *the new theatricality* of the performance, important directors of international festivals inviting him to perform. **Afrim** brings on the stage "*an unusually free script*"–

as he says. In this re-adaptation of Chekhov – in his quality of director, script writer, scene designer and musical illustrator – **Afrim** is doing a “profanation” of the Slavic soul as well as the famous characters’ feelings. In an austere space, coldly illuminated, the immediate reality, the pedestrian every day life creates chocking images. So, Irina wears trainers and a body on which is written “*I Love Moskba*”. The scene is invaded by a caricatured, sadist-masochist world driven by primary instincts and forcing back obsessions which shamelessly shows an excessive sexuality. From this suite the suicides Missis Vershinin doesn’t fail, she appears with a rope around the neck. The human suffering receives tunes of a buffoon requiem. Masters of this ceremony are the old Anfisa and the alcoholic doctor Tcebutikin – bizarre creatures, physically and psychologically degenerated, carrying a samovar used at the same time like a surprise box and a funeral pot for the sisters’ father.

Radu Afrim demystifies, he violently usurps the illusions and the ideals of the heroes.

The tirade about the shiny future (“*in three hundred years the life on this earth will be unbelievable beautiful, mysterious*”) will turn into a talk-show moderated by Vershinin, an old and vulgar bachelor. In the show The Time is an unseen character, a malefic, funeral force floating over the people and things. The representation begins with a surrealist image: Tchebutikin eating a watch, surrounded by pots and bottles which conserve the relics of the past, old photos got out from an ancient album of remembers.

Radu Afrim’s setting has got a hallucinate visual dynamics. A game of intriguing, catching *puzzle* rigorously controlled. The autocratic spirit of the director is shining. The atrocious and macabre comedy of the Chekhovian characters stigmatised our time so confused, deprived of love and faith. For **Radu Afrim** and his partners, Chekhov is “*a colder author than the Devil*”. The end makes you trembling: for surviving, for defending themselves of the interior and exterior emptiness, the sisters wear gas masks and get dancing in a delirant dance. We leave the theatre hall chocked, followed by Chekhov’s words: “*You live so ugly, Sir!*”

The *doc* model gave birth to a new very important group movement in a Romanian theatre: **dramAcum / dramNow**. “*We are tired to complain each other how bad, stiff and old fashioned one conceives, one writes, and one chooses a text for a theatre*

*performance now. We ask ourselves and we want to find out from you how would have write Caragiale, Shakespeare, Tchekov a text after watching **Pulp Fiction** or **Todo sobre mi madre**. Ask yourself why, how and for whom do we need to write theatre now, and the answer comes from the best young drama writers, directors, scene designers, choreographers and musicians who work **Acum / Now**. Write a piece of theatre for a contest. We will produce the performance!*“ This is the appeal of an exemplary dedicated to the Romanian nowadays dramaturgy, built up on two conceptions: *the relation Drama writer -Director and the Reality as a Source* owned by the Chair of Directing within the National University for Theatre and Cinema “I.L. Caragiale” from Bucharest. Its initiators are students and graduates of this prestigious institution of artistic education: **Andreea Vălean, Gianina Cărbunariu, Radu Apostol, and Alexandru Berceanu**. *Spiritus Rector* of this group is university lecturer PhD. **Nicolae Manda**, who declared: “**dramAcum / DramNow** are part of a today necessary working strategy in a school of arts. It aimed to develop the creativity throughout individual or collective projects assumed like artistic experiences, not like examination topics. As a start, the model has been the famous Royal Court whose activity is dedicated exclusively for almost half a century to promote the contemporary English play and where Andreea Vălean, Gianina Cărbunariu attended courses.” Launched in January 2002, within colloquies in the press and on internet, the results of the project **dramAcum / dramNow** have been much appreciated. Hundreds of plays have been sent at the contest. The best ones have been selected and presented in performances – lecture or representations. In addition to the contest, **dramAcum / dramNow** developed also a program of translations with contemporary plays. The revelation was that the young Romanian authors found co-partners of their spirit on other parts of the world being of the same attitudes and having the same topics. The leaders of **dramAcum / dramNow**, top artists of the young stage directing, succeeded to impose themselves, their productions giving personality to some spaces of alternative theatre and initiating international cooperation programs. This anxious and alarming group succeeded to promote him even on other meridians, in their texts and performances live the existentialist crises of Romania today and other western capitals. A recent example is **Gianina Cărbunariu**. Her text **Stop the Tempo**, considered by the theatre critics like “*an identity mark of The Cool Generation*”, “*a generation of*

idles” has been successfully at the Biennale of Wiesbaden, Paris, Berlin, Dublin, New York. Heroes are three youngsters unhappy and alone, frustrated, belonging to the category of those transformed in productive and consummate machines. They meet in the Evil of a bar and are decided to shock a world stigmatized by the cross of lovenessness. By an act of “urban terrorism” – the characters are cutting off the electricity in public spaces. It performances very close to the audience, in the dark, with a minimalist stage set: lanterns handled by actors, which flashes burn inquisitional the heroes and the audience’s faces. The violence of the language is shocking in Romania and conquered the West and by the proposed *theatricality*, an intriguing manner of doing theatre “*centered on the voice, on the brutal word, on the interior dialogue, on the poetical insert which is covering the story and transcends the vulgar reality*”. Gianina Cărbunariu recidivists with a new play, *madybaby.edu*, elaborated in a scholarship at the Royal Court and represented successfully at the Biennale of Wiesbaden, in Romania and on several European stages from Berlin, Milan, Moscow, and Paris. The moral and physical misery, the ugliness has a metaphysical dimension. *The Director - Drama writer* uses creatively from the writing the means of video, altering the reality with the virtual. Archetypes of our time – the prostitute, the procurer, the administrator of a porno site – evolutes in a decomposed time. God is dead; the world is empty of sense and the man of values in a performance which overwhelms the naturalism of the story by the directing creativity. The **Award of the Critics** given of the International Association of the Theatre Critics – Romanian Section to the **dramAcum / dramNow** was a sign of recognizing the value of these artists. These young directors are the ace of diamonds for the today’s Romanian stage and for tomorrow, too.

The way towards the *new theatricality* is not without any danger of a theatre without traditions and spirit, of the danger of a language without feeling, without spirit especially when the logic of the modern world implies the total lack of sacredness in all our life, the brutal changing of the traditional relation with God and the world. As lot of his contemporaries, in order to obtain the power, Faust -Director sign sometimes a pact with Mefisto. Blind and overwhelmed by its time, he did not perceive the eternity. He wants to achieve his human condition, not to overpass it. A **S.O.S.** launched by the critic George

Banu, fine expert of the contemporary theatrical phenomenon, who quoted: *“At the end of the ‘90 the appetite for revolt reappeared and the principle of disorder came again for capturing the spirit of the time and to transform the chaos into the essence of the modernity. The scene becomes a territory of a present without landmarks and borders. What is the solution: to register the stream of the epoch or to resist to it; to listen to the breath of the present or to move your eyes elsewhere? To adapt or to capitulate? These two positions how can one ally them, how can one save him? Faust, famous character of Goethe, discovers finally that what is important is that “The Heaven and the Earth should be together”*. Theatre needs today a spiritual missionary. The faces of the new theatricality impose a theological reflection. Life as well as the Scene non-connected to God is deserts where the characters are lost. Their time is without eternity. Their existence is a pretext for evasions and exhibitionisms.

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